YOUNG DAYS.

WINTER GUESTS. (see page 137.)

No. 180.—December, 1890. Vol. XV.

WINTER'S COMING.

SEE the fairy snow-flakes,
  Dancing in the flue !
Old Mr. Santa Claus,
  What is keeping you ?
Twilight and firelight ;
  Shadows come and go ;
Merry chimes of sleigh-bells
  Tinkling through the snow ;
Mother's knitting stockings
  (Pussy's got the ball)—
Don't you think that Winter's
  Pleasanter than all ?

BROTHERS.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "BASIL NORTH," "AMID THE STORM," ETC.

CHAPTER II.

THE next day broke clear and bright, and at six o'clock, as usual, Max started out with a towel thrown over his shoulder, on his way to the sea for an early morning swim. As he opened the gate, Rupert called to him to stop, and, turning round, he waited while his brother limped slowly towards him. They presented a strong contrast, the cripple boy with his stooping, attenuated form, and dark, sullen face, the other straight, broad, and muscular, with his bright countenance and ready smile.

"Come on, old boy," he exclaimed, tucking his arm through Rupert's as soon as the latter reached him! "Are you going for a dip, too? It is a first-rate morning for one, the sun is so hot."

"No," answered Rupert, "I seldom bathe as you know, but I thought I should like a walk along the cliff."

"All right ; just wait while I have my swim, and then we can go together."

"Can't you come now? We shan't have much of a walk if once you get into the water."

"I won't be long, old man; only ten minutes, on my honour. Just look at the sea, what fellow could resist it?"

"*I* could ; but still go," replied Rupert, and sitting down on a seat facing the sea, he waited for his brother, wishing, as the waves rose now and again and hid him from view, that they would engulf him altogether, and so remove from his path one whom, in his envy and jealousy, he was growing to hate more and more each day. He had only accompanied Max hoping that a long walk would unfit him for the afternoon's racing, and he was still brooding and nourishing his envious feelings when his brother rejoined him, looking fresher and more full of life and vigour than usual, after his contest with the waves.

"Which way shall we go?" he asked.

"Oh ! towards Poole, it is so much quieter," answered Rupert.

They had proceed some way in silence along the West Cliff when Rupert's attention was attracted by a seagull that was fluttering about on the sands as if injured ; he went to the edge of the cliff and stood watching it in an absorbed manner.

"What is the matter!" questioned Max, who was in advance of his brother, turning back to see what was interesting him so unusually. "What *are* you staring at?"

"Do you see that seagull down there?" rejoined Rupert pointing with his stick towards the base of the cliff.

"No ! Where?" and throwing himself down on the ground he leaned over as far as he possibly could, stretching out at the same time to push aside the branch of a gorse bush that rather impeded his view ; but in doing so he lost his balance and was suddenly precipitated over the edge of the cliff, the branch cracking and breaking beneath his weight.

Rupert who was standing by, wishing for the second time that day that some accident would happen to his brother, no sooner saw his unnatural wish fulfilled than he was seized with remorse, and felt that he would willingly sacrifice his own life if by doing so he could save him from the terrible fate he feared awaited him. He looked round wildly to see if help were near, but no one was in sight, all was still and quiet. nothing stirring but the surging sea in front, and the tall dark pines behind ; he stooped over the cliff and called frantically to him to know if he were alive. Again and again he called, but no answer was returned, and knowing that it was utterly impossible, for him at least, to reach Max in any other way, he began reluctantly to retrace his steps, walking as quickly as he could with the aid of his stick ; as he hastened along he was haunted by the idea that he had killed him, his wish was so barely formed before it was realised, that it seemed like a judgment upon him, and it was with difficulty that he dragged his halting feet forward ; but fear

spurred him on, and reaching the wooden steps leading to the sands he hurriedly descended as he caught sight of a boatman strolling towards him from under the pier.

Rupert at once implored his assistance for his brother, which he was only too ready to render, and he soon set off running along the sands followed by a doctor and three or four comrades whom he had summoned to his aid.

When they reached Max they found him lying upon his back insensible, with one arm twisted under him ; his face was pale and drawn, and his right hand still clenched the gorse branch which he had caught at in a desperate effort to arrest his fall. The doctor after a slight examination administered a draught which elicited a feeble groan, though he still remained unconscious ; then with great difficulty they lifted him on to the stretcher hastily improvised from sails, and bore him along with slow and sorrowful steps towards his home.

The doctor sent Rupert on first to prepare his parents for their arrival, and he reached the house just as the breakfast bell began to ring.

"Where is Max ?" asked his father, "I expected to find him all impatience to begin breakfast ; I know he wants to be off early with some of the fellows to inspect the ground. Why what is the matter ?" he added suddenly catching sight of Rupert's pale agitated face. "Has anything happened ?"

"Yes," gasped Rupert, "Max has fallen over the cliff, they are bringing him home now."

"Fallen over the cliff !" echoed Mr. Lynne in a tone of horror, while his mother rose from her seat at the head of the table with a look of agony on her face, she moved a few steps towards him, struggling to say something, but her tongue refused to articulate, and with a piteous moan she fell fainting into her husband's arms.

Mildred sobbing wildly rushed for restoratives, but as she reached the hall she stopped, rooted to the spot, for there in the centre was the doctor speaking in hushed tones to the butler, while a group of boatmen stood near gazing sadly down at the ghastly face lying so motionless against the coarse brown of the sails.

"Oh ! Miss Mildred !" exclaimed Robson the butler as he looked up and saw her standing close to him. "Why are you here ? Pray go back into the dining room."

"Come, my dear," said the doctor taking her little hand gently between his own, and trying to lead her from the hall.

But his touch seemed to rouse her, and snatching her hand away she darted past him to Max's side, but the sight of his unconscious face, and the bandages round his crushed hand proved too much for her, and with a heart-rending cry of "Max ! Max !" she sank on the ground at the boatmen's feet covering her eyes with her hands.

Mr. Lynne hearing the cry hurriedly placed his wife upon a sofa, and ringing for a maid to attend her, followed Mildred into the hall. His eyes took in all the dreadful details at once, and as he looked down at his elder son, of whose strength he had always been so proud, he scarcely dared to ask the brief question "Is he alive ?" So like death did he appear. The doctor reassured him at once on that point, and Max was immediately taken to his room, the boatmen wondering as they stole softly from the darkened chamber whether the poor boy would ever leave it alive.

It was about half past twelve on the same day that a number of boys were grouped in front of a long tent standing at one side of the field where the college sports were to take place ; this tent was specially attractive, for in it the prizes were laid out for inspection, and in the centre rising above any of the others, stood the challenge cup that Max had won at the high jump for the last two years, and had hoped to-day to make his own.

It was a very large field well mown and rolled, with a good running track round it ; several tents had been erected, and all was in readiness for the spectators who would arrive about two, at which time the sports commenced.

"I can't think why Lynne isn't here," said Fred Joyce as he looked with an air of proprietorship at a silver mug, thinking that in the half mile race he was not to be beaten, and that in all probability it would soon be his.

"Nor I," returned Moore who was never far from Joyce, "he told me he would be here at ten to try the jumps, and see that things were all right ; and he is usually such a punctual chap, something must have prevented him. Perhaps his governor turned rusty and wouldn't let him start so soon."

"Nonsense," retorted Joyce, "you know old Lynne is a jolly sort, not at all likely to stop——"

"I say !" here interrupted a boy elbowing his way into their midst, his usually good-natured face pale and scared, "I say have you heard the news about poor Lynne ?"

"Lynne ! No ! what about him ?"

"Why he fell over the cliff this morning and broke his back."

"Broke his back!" exclaimed a chorus of voices. "Is he dead then?" asked Joyce in a hushed voice.

"Not quite," returned Browne, "I met Robson—their butler you know—just going away from here, he came up to tell old Barnes about Lynne and to say that now he would not be able to join in the sports."

"How did he fall over, and is he much hurt?" asked Joyce.

"Oh! he was looking at a seagull or something of that sort, and lost his balance. Poor chap, the doctors say his spine is injured for life, and that if he does recover he will never be able to walk again; his hand too they think will have to come off."

"Poor old Max," said Fred Joyce in a choked voice, hastily turning away to hide the very apparent tears in his eyes. "Tell Mr. Barnes," he presently added, "to scratch my name out, I shan't run now."

"Nor I, nor I," rejoined several others, I wish the whole thing could be put off."

"I wonder who will get the challenge cup now," said Browne.

"I shouldn't think any one would be mean enough to try for it," fiercely answered Joyce. "Max would have won it for certain if this accident hadn't happened, therefore, it ought to be given to him now."

A murmur of assent followed his words as he turned away followed by Moore and Ash; they made their way at once to "The Pines"—Mr. Lynne's house—and as they passed the lawn they saw Rupert crouched upon the seat under the cedar. They crossed over to him at once and asked how Max was then. Rupert looked at them with haggard eyes and said he didn't know; just the same he thought; and there they all stood moving restlessly about, and boy-like quite incapable of putting their thoughts into words.

Presently Ash, who was noted for saying the wrong thing at the wrong time, burst forth with "I say Rupert, aren't you sorry now that you ever minded Max being such an athletic chap?"

Rupert turned round with one of his old fierce looks, his eyes literally blazing; soon, however, the passion died down and a look of the most hopeless misery took its place.

"Yes," he answered quietly, "yes, I am sorry for that, and———several other things."

Ash saw that as usual he had made a mistake, so muttering something about begging his pardon, began slowly to beat a retreat, the others very soon following his example.

* * * * *

Yule tide was drawing near, holly trees were beginning to lose their branches, geese and turkeys were growing seriously alarmed at the many gaps made in their family circles; schools and colleges were just breaking up, Grosvenor College among the rest.

It was the last day of the term, and the boys were indulging in a few parting words before separating for the holidays, in one corner of the play-ground stood Joyce and Moore; they had been talking for some minutes when Rupert, whose face wore a look of intense sadness, came up to wish them both "A Merry Christmas."

"Same to you old chap." They answered, and then paused thinking what a mockery it was for them to do so.

But he said "Thank you," very quietly, fully understanding all that the boys left unuttered.

"What a changed fellow he is," remarked Joyce as he watched Rupert's retreating figure, "I can remember the time when he would have flown into an awful passion at a slip like that."

"Yes, he has never been the same since poor Lynne's death; I can't think why he felt it so much, for he hardly ever had a good word to say for him."

"That's just it Moore; I fancy if he had not always treated his brother so badly, he would not be cut up to that extent now. It was the shock of the accident he felt most I am sure, for he told me he was glad for Squire's sake that he only survived it six weeks; such a life of inaction he knew would have been intolerable to him.—Poor old Max!"

"Well whatever it was," said Moore, "I must say it has made another fellow of him; instead of being the embittered, cross grained, and fiery chap he was, he is as gentle and meek tempered as a girl."

"Umph! I am not so sure about all girls being meek tempered, but still putting that on one side, I agree with you that Richard is a much better sort now; I expect he will soon leave here, for he is going in for no end of grinding."

"Yes, the only time he seems at all happy is when he is working. Ah! Ash old fellow, good-bye, it is a case of 'when shall we three meet again,' for I suppose you are going now?"

"Yes, I am off to Yorkshire as I told you, and I expect I shall have a rare good time," he exclaimed shaking hands heartily. "I hope you will have a jolly Christmas too, and no end of fun."

G. H.

BIRDS OF MANY FEATHERS.

(Concluded.)

I REMEMBER, one cold winter, we had no less than five pet robins, which daily visited our pantry and kitchen; these little creatures thankfully received our donation of crumbs and corn; and one in particular attached himself so much to us, that he would fearlessly hop across our feet, and look up in our faces with his cunning black eye, as if he would have said, "Are you displeased at such liberties?" The other robins left us when the mild weather returned, but this pretty creature continued to visit us occasionally all the spring, and built its nest in the middle branches of a laurustinas tree that grew near the lattice of the pantry window. Here I must observe, that the nest of the robin is rather a slovenly piece of architecture, being loosely and carelessly put together, without much attention to shape or neatness; it is composed of dried leaves, ragged moss roots, and hair, with a few feathers in the interior. The robin builds occasionally in the sunny side of a ditch or bank, or within a shed; but more generally in some thick leafy bush near the ground.

There is something peculiarly charming in the song of this bird; so clear, so exhilirating, that it gives me positive pleasure to listen to its carol. Even in spring, when the air is filled with music from every bush and tree, I can distinguish the clear, sharp notes of my favourite songster among the general chorus.

Last winter one of these birds, urged by the inclemency of the weather, became our constant guest, leaving the kitchen only for a short period at a time. The little fellow made himself perfectly at home with the servants, attending their table during meal times, and receiving all scraps with which they were pleased to favour him; taking his stand on the frame of one of the neigbouring chairs, from whence he had a good view of the ground beneath the table, and ready to hop forth when a crumb fell. He enjoyed, indeed, the range of the kitchen and pantry at will, and throve exceedingly on his good fare: from being small and thin, Mr. Robin plumped out into a fine fat bird, and became so bold and saucy, that he would so far forget his good manners as to hop on to the table, and without waiting for an invitation, help himself to bread, and any morsel that lay conveniently in his way; nothing escaped the glance of his clear bright eye. His favourite situations were the top of the open pantry door, the frame of the old-fashioned round table, or one of the oaken pegs behind the kitchen door, where he would sit and warble forth his sweet song, as if to reward us for the food and shelter we afforded him. But though he was, without exception, the finest and handsomest, and most familiar robin I ever saw, I must confess he was not without his faults, as his behaviour one day fully proved.

One cold, snowy morning, robin was absent from the kitchen much longer than usual, and we were beginning to wonder what had become of him, when he suddenly made his entry through the open lattice of the pantry, accompanied by two other robins, exceedingly lean and ill-favoured; forming a striking contrast with our fat, comely little friend. It was evident these two were invited guests, by the patronising manner in which Mr. Rob did the honours of the house; introducing them to his favourite perches, and showing them where the best food was to be found. This was all very well; but I am sorry to say, his subsequent conduct was not distinguished by that kindness and liberality the votaries of true hospitality are bound to observe. Scarcely had his hungry visitors begun to partake of the crumbs that were scattered beneath the table, than he bristled up his feathers, hopping about with a menacing air, and scolding in harsh and angry tones. A battle immediately commenced, which was maintained for some minutes with great spirit, by one of his outraged guests; but victory decided, at length, in favour of our old acquaintance, he being nearly half as big again as his famished adversary. Having driven both his visitors from the kitchen, Rob returned elated with success, and flying to his favourite peg sang a song of triumph; puffing out his red breast, and ruffling his feathers, as if to express his satisfaction for having vanquished his enemies.

This ungenerous behaviour, on the part of old pet, quite lost him my esteem; and proved the opinion of naturalists to be just, when they declare the robin to be combative, jealous, and selfish towards his own species, though gentle and confiding in his general behaviour to man.

The robin is a native of the whole European continent, and in all countries is distinguished for the confiding manner in which he enters the dwellings of man, and silently, as it were, prefers his claims for food and protection. His attractive little ways endear him to us, and he ever receives a kind and affectionate welcome. In every country he is distinguished by some familiar appellation. In Sweden he is called Tommi Liden, in Norway Peter Ronsmad, in Germany Thomas Gierdet, in Italy he is Petto Rosso (or Redbreast), and in England Robin, "Pretty Robin Redbreast."

LITTLE ASKER'S PAGE.

When I was a boy the time from Christmas to Christmas seemed so long! Quick in going, slow in coming, seemed Christmas. Which shows, I suppose, that I must have enjoyed my Christmasses. And indeed, so I did.

And yet, my Little Askers, it was not because I had a great many Christmas things! A short holiday, a school tea-party, songs, recitations, and a sacred drama; a few days sliding, skating, or sledging, were the chief things I had to get my fun out of. But then it was such fun for all that. Of course, I have been as happy since, and am as happy now, but, that Christmas fun when a boy, makes me quite sure that it is thoughts much more than things, and feelings much more than thoughts, which make one happy, either at Christmas or any other time.

There was, however, one other thing we sometimes did which perhaps you might like to hear about. We used to go A-Christmassing. Two or three of us, sometimes more, would go to the houses of people we knew, and ask if they want the Christmassers? If they were willing, as they usually were, we went in and sang. The words of the song being something like these:—

Here we come a Christmassing among the leaves so green,
Here we come a wandering so fairly to be seen,
For it is in Christmas time strangers travel far and near,
So God bless you and send you a happy new year.

Chorus—A new year, a new year, a happy new year,
So God bless you all and send a happy new year.

God bless the master of this house, likewise the mistress too,
And all the little children that round the table go
We are not daily beggars that beg from door to door,
But we are neighbours' children that you have seen before.

Chorus.

We have got a little purse made of stretching leather skin,
So please to give a small mite to line the same within,
Call up the butler of this house, and order him to bring
A little of your Christmas fare, and better we will sing.

Chorus.

In parts of Yorkshire girls go, taking with them usually a paper box, in which is a nicely-dressed doll, having round it evergreens, a bit of mistletoe, and a few apples and oranges, the whole covered over with a white cloth. They go into the house, display their doll, and sing the song. After singing come spice cake and cheese, and a few coppers, and then they sing, perhaps, "While Shepherds" or "Christians, Awake!"

Well, these were things to enjoy. And if we were to go back and ask what Christmas was like three thousand years ago, when it was still called "Yule," we should find that it was, to begin with, a festival of enjoyment, mainly for fun and feasting. But since Jesus was born, two thousand years ago, we call the season after his second name, and keep it as his birthday. His birthday! And just think what he was:—the great, good brother of us all. Yes, and the one best thing he made us truly know was that, as God is our Father, so the richest and the poorest are really our sisters and brothers. So that, still keeping the time as a festival of enjoyment, we also keep Christmas now as a festival of brotherhood. Do we? Do you, my Little Askers? If not, I will tell you how you might easily begin this very Christmas. Think! There are five million children in England, and I am safe in saying that three million of these never get a Christmas card. Why should we get and keep so many? Suppose we put a few of those we are keeping into clean envelopes, and hand them to some Sunday school teacher to give to his or her class of poor children; or better still, write the names on the envelopes of poor children we know, and take them ourselves to their homes. For cards already written on you may find a use in pasting them nicely in a scrap-book, and then give the book to the children's ward in a hospital, or to some one ill whom you know, or anythng else like this that you think of yourself you might do, and then you will be keeping up both the good old festival of enjoyment and the good new festival of brotherhood. One, two, three, six people made happy by each of us. What happiness even we may make this Christmas?

Don't let this Christmas go by without trying. Write and tell me what you do.

But now before we go and do anything, suppose we just read something together which

I am very fond of, and which I have read every Christmas for many years past. Here it is :—

THE CHRIST-CHILD.

A sketch of what may have been, with hints of what was : adapted from *F. Frothingham.*

Long, long ago a little child was born. Before his birth, beautiful angels came to his young mother, in the shape of high and wonderful thoughts about the little one whose life was bound up in her own. This was not unusual. It is apt to be the case with noble young mothers. But, if not unusual, it is wonderful and beautiful,—a sign from God of the good that may be in a well-born and well-trained life.—The mother of this child was of the best. A virgin mother indeed, because in all the purity of a consecrated love she gave herself to the work of building up the young life, placed in her care, into a manhood that might realise even *her* hearts highest and most awful hope.

A baby in a manger was on unwonted sight. Many would throng to see it, and some among them would even say that so strange a beginning meant a career as remarkable. Perhaps in her secret soul the fond, proud mother—she of the angelic thoughts and pure virgin aims—felt so too ; nay was sure of it ; but, too discreet to talk thereof, she cherished it as a prophetic conviction only to be uttered in the noble training she would give her son.

More and more clearly he showed himself to be a wondrous child. As other children do he began to ask the great, deep, simple questions which man forever asks, and which no man has yet proved great enough to finally answer. But, unlike other children, he asked them more and more. Deeper and more eager grew his questioning. No mere spasms of curiosity were they to his young soul. Answer he must have, cost what it might. The young mother found herself awe-struck and trembling before a growing soul whose measure would soon pass all her power to span. But still her virgin instincts true kept fast her hold upon his young obedience and his filial faithfulness. Gladly she took him to the Great City where all the tribes of her people gathered every year, and where their most wise and learned men were found, in the hope that among them he might get the answers which she knew not how to give. Surely in its glorious Temple could be found men able for the deepest questions of one so young. Simple-hearted mother ! Vain hope !

He could astonish the teachers to whom he went by the things he wanted to know. They could astonish him by their ignorance of what wise and learned men, it would seem, ought to know. . . . . .

His questions gathered into one ; *could not man's suffering, sorrow, and sin be removed, and he be led into the blessed life of God?* This tremendous question they could not answer. Not about such were they busy. Back to his lowly home he went, to seek in his own thought, and prayer, and life the answer that he needed. The question burned within him like a fire.

He prayed hard for answer, sure that God could not fail to give it. And God answered his prayer. But how ? Not by telling what he wanted to know, but by whispering in his soul that he must himself make answer. That he must go into the world and *live* the lovely life his soul's eye saw, must help others to live it, loving God and one another, putting away their badness, and entering here and now into the heavenly goodness.

What an answer ! And to a lad. And yet it was all. What should he say to it ? "Yes," or "No ?"

Manhood came. Men called him a child no more. And yet he was a child still. His dear mother and father saw in him their child, though he was fast growing into a life beyond their measure. To them he bore himself as a tender and obedient son. And so he was a child still.

More and more also did he find himself to be the child of another Father whom no eye had ever seen, but with whom, in his own great language and way, he was learning to talk and walk day by day, and to whom he would be only a child forever and ever.

But still the great question was unanswered. Years passed. Life pressed on. The ripe hour came. Yes or No ?

A glorious man he saw, who had been a boy with him, who was near his own age, and who now came forth to speak for himself the immortal yes. He could stay no longer. Yes or no, *he* must speak.

In the loneliness of the desert, fierce temptations battling for his life, calmly and for ever he answered—*Yes !*

"Yes," said Jesus, "the sufferings of men, and women, and children *can* be removed,—their sin and sorrow too,—and all be led into the blessed life of God." That was his answer. And we can help him to make it true this Christmas, and every day, by being Christs and Christ-childs !

With every good wish to all my Little Askers.

Always yours,

J. J. Wright.

A SNOW FABLE.

BY MRS. W. D. BAIKIE.

AUTHOR OF "THE QUEEN OF THE CAVES," "SNORRO'S TEMPTATION," ETC., ETC.

"How cold it is! Dear-r-r me," shivered a Snow-baby, as he perched on the top of a fine young fir-tree, that—planted in a tub and occupying the place of honour in the middle of a small cart full of evergreens—was on its way to a town to be decorated with things dazzling and wonderful, to delight the hearts of some fortunate children on Christmas Eve.

"Cold!" echoed a starling, that sat on a branch a little lower down. "Cold indeed! Perhaps you'll say next that its freezing. Chirra!"

"Ah? that must be a sneeze," said the Snow-baby, reflectively, and without replying to the Starling's jeering remarks. "That great black creature, with all those thick feathers on, may feel the cold too, so it may freeze soon, as he said. I shall speak to him although he did look rather terrible when he made that curious sound." Then the Snow-baby steadied his small voice, and said sweetly:—

"I beg your pardon, but I think you made a sneezing remark, which means, I suppose, that you hope that frost and snow are coming soon."

"Chir-r-r-a!" screamed the Starling, irate at being misunderstood. "Indeed, I hope no such thing. Why should I wish that all the nice, clear streams and pools should be frozen over, so that there will be nothing to drink, or that everything should be covered with snow, so that we shall have great difficulty in finding any food?"

"That would be very sad," returned the Snow-baby. "But then you must like snow for other reasons. It makes one feel so warm and brisk, and ——"

"Hear him, chic, chic, chrr! Snow makes one warm! Chir-r-r-a! Such ignorance! Poor, naked, shivering thing! Wait till the snow comes, and then you will be made to feel whether it is warm or not. I hate the nasty stuff."

"Oh, surely you are quite mistaken in your idea of white weather. It does good. We Snow-babies, delight in it. When the beautiful snowflakes begin to fall, we cease to shiver, for we are soon clothed with their soft fleeciness, and our wings are feathered with their downy fluff, and then we are ready for our work."

"A likely story," sneered the Starling. "Snowflakes keep one warm indeed! Ugh! Nasty cold things! It is a good thing that they melt and pass away."

"I have heard that they even do good as they pass away," replied the Snow-baby. "Farmers say that they fertilise the ground, but I do not know if that is so, for we leave the world as soon as the snow has fallen—our work is then done."

"Work!" jeered the Starling. "A tiny creature like you! Why I could snip you in two with my beak! What work can *you* do, pr-r-ray?"

The Snow-baby laughed. "Not a great deal by myself, certainly," he said, "but then there are a great, great many of us. We come in myriads with the snowflakes, and we flit and hover and dash about among them, and toss them hither and thither as they fall, so that they shall adorn and beautify the world while the flowers are all asleep. We dress the branches and twigs of bushes and trees till their feathery beauty makes children cry out, 'Oh! the Fairies have been here!' Then we laugh with delight, for *we* have done it—not the fairies at all. They only come in spring and summer."

"Where do they go in winter, then?" asked the Starling, with some curiosity.

"Ah! I mustn't tell you that! Lots of little boys and girls ask—

Oh! where do fairies hide their heads, when snow lies on the ground?

but it would never do to tell them, for the fairies need a quiet rest all winter to prepare them for their work in summer, and if their secret hiding-place were known, they would never have any peace. All kinds of people would want to interview them, and to write articles about them in the newspapers with taking headings, such as 'Titania at Home,' 'How Fairy Floriel entertains her Guests,' and so on. Once that kind of thing begins, good-bye to work."

"There you go again," said the ill-tempered Starling. "Work, work! always talking of work. But you sit there with your wings folded—a miserable image of helpless idleness. I have a great mind to snap you up for my dinner, to find out what you taste like! That will put an end to your prating," and he began to whet his beak viciously on a branch of holly, making the berries fly off as he did so.

"Hi! Yah!" shouted Hodge, the boy who was driving the cart. "Don't ee spoil all t' holly," and he cracked his heavy whip, and flicked the thong of it towards the Starling,

who flew away with a scream of "Chirr, chirr, chir-r-ra!"

"T' snaw be'ant far off," soliloquised Hodge. "Hi, Dobbin, gee-up!" and he cracked his whip again, as he trudged on whistling.

The Starling, perched on a wall, waited a few moments, and when Hodge was not noticing, he flew back, and ensconsed himself under the drooping branches of the fir-tree on the moist, brown earth in which its roots were planted.

All this time the Snow-baby had been pondering on the words of the Starling, "a miserable image of useless idleness! Well, I suppose I *do* look like that," he said sadly. "Oh! I wish the snowflakes would come. It is hard to shiver and wait with nothing to do."

"They also work who only stand and wait," creaked the Fir-tree, in odorous accents. The Snow-baby gave a sigh of relief, and lovingly pressing his ear close, he listened to hear what more the Fir-tree had to say. It continued:—

"It was a poet who said those words—one who had great sympathy with nature. He understood us trees very well. We taught him a great deal by our whispering and sighing, and he said many fine things about us. I am sure he meant those words principally for us, and they give us great comfort, because our work is not active, but passive. Our life is one long wait. We stand and wait, wait, wait.

Spring comes and swells our buds till they burst out into the leafy garlands with which summer adorns us. Then, while squirrels play and birds sing and build their nests and chirrup their active hours away among our branches, we wait till autumn comes. With a brush of gorgeous hues and magic quickness she paints the forest. Still we wait, wait, wait. Our leaves drop off and shrivel and wither, tossed and driven, the sport of every wind that blows. Winter has come, and with him, Jack Frost. We feel his icy breath on our buds, the buds that are in their turn awaiting the return of spring to woo them into active life. But though we know that Jack Frost is nipping them in their delicate infancy, we cannot shelter them. We can do nothing but wait. It is therefore great happiness to know that we are doing our Master's work while we patiently wait to fulfil the ends for which we were made, and these are passive too."

"Poor trees," cooed the Snow-baby, in his tones of softest sympathy. "But we are your friends, for when Jack Frost is too nipping in his attentions we dress your twigs in the soft snow flakes, and they shield them from harm. Here they come. Oh! here come the lovely snow flakes at last." And the Snow-baby stood up and stretched out his wings and caught the first flakes as they came down gently, hesitating and wavering, uncertain, it seemed, of their destination.

The starling watched the tiny, naked wings and body put on white, glistening plumes, and soon the miserable image of useless idleness was transformed into a creature full of vigour and activity.

The snow flakes fell fast, and faster. The ugly muddy road, the brown ploughed fields, the bare, withered pasture lands, smoke begrimed cottages and naked hedge-rows, soon put on a garment of purest white. The falling flakes settled here, there, everywhere; but always on just the very spot where they were most needed. The starling thought he could discern myriads of snow-babies flitting and darting about in their busy flight; but so swiftly did they move and so intent were they on their work as they flashed hither and thither among the mad, whirling snow flakes, that he could not be sure. They looked so like snow-flakes too, that it was very difficult to tell the one from the other.

At last there came a lull. The snow flakes grew few and smaller, and then they ceased to fall. The starling shook himself discontentedly though the branches of the fir-tree had sheltered him, and very few snowflakes, thanks to the friendly care of the Snow-babies, had touched him. A small voice, which seemed familiar to him, and yet strange, for it was brisk and full of rapture, exclaimed:—

"Yes! it is all lovely now. Oh! just lovely and pure."

Looking up, the starling saw the Snow-baby standing on his old perch, the top of the fir tree, and gazing around on the landscape.

"What a change!" he cried. Oh! what a brilliant change. All is white and glistening and draped and spotless instead of dark and dull and naked and dirty as it was before."

"You are changed too," snapped the starling. "You are no longer a miserable image, but dazzling, and your eyes shine with gladness. What has changed you so?"

"I am happy, because I have done my work and earned my promotion."

Truly the Snow-baby was dazzling. The flash of the Kohinoor, or the rainbow light of a sunbeam reflected in a drop of gleaming dew, would look dim beside the radiance that shone around him as he stretched out his glittering pinions, saying:—

"Good-bye, Mr. Starling. Jack Frost is here. It is his turn now. Good-bye, patient fir-tree,

and thank you for the lesson you taught me. My work is done. I am going home."

"That war a big snow-flake on top of t' fir tree," said Hodge. "It be gone fast, to be sure. Hi, Dobbin, gee-up!"

"Well," soliloquised the Starling, "if doing one's work will make one half as happy as that little chap looked when he had done his, it is worth one's while to be up and doing. Besides, who knows but that it might bring me promotion too. I wonder if promotion is something good to eat? That reminds me that sitting here will not find supper for my invalid wife, so I'm off to search for promotion.

In time he found it.

GOOD-BYE TO 1890.

GOOD-BYE to spring and summer;
The winds of autumn moan,
We see the flowers no longer,
The singing birds have flown.

The forest trees are leafless,
The skies drop tears of rain,
The fields are bare that lately
Were bright with golden grain.

Good-bye to birds and flowers,
To all the long, glad days;
For spring and summer's beauty
We sing our song of praise.

Yet, see! the snow is falling,
New pictures greet our eyes;
Each coming day Old Winter
Will bring some fresh surprise.

And when the snows are melted,
When falls the "early rain,"
Fair spring and glorious summer
Will greet us once again.

THE country-folk in Oldenburg consider the magpie to be so imbued with Satanic principles that, if a cross be cut on the tree in which the bird has built, she will forsake her nest at once. There are several reasons for this bird's bad reputation in the North of England. One of them is "because she was the only bird that would not go into the ark with Noah and his folk. She liked better to perch on the roof and jabber over the drowning world."

THE HOLLY AND THE MISTLETOE.

"On Christmas Eve the bells were rung;
On Christmas Eve the mass was sung;
That only night in all the year
Saw the stoled priest the chalice rear:
The damsel donn'd her kirtle sheen!
The hall was dressed with holly green;
Forth to the woods did merry-men go
To gather in the Mistletoe;
Then open'd wide the baron's hall,
To vassal, tenant, serf and all."

WHAT a merry time these people seem to be having! Far away in those old Feudal times; *they* all believed in a merry Christmas and so do we. From the oldest to the youngest we like to dress up our rooms and our schools with the holly and the mistletoe.

Because we are quite sure all have these plants I want to have a short chat about them. The holly is seen so much at Christmas that it has come to be itself, called Christmas, just as we call the hawthorne, May. Both the trees point to the seasons in which they are most beautiful. In a very old poem in the British Musem, it is called the Holy-tree, showing how from earliest times people decorated the churches with its branches. Is it not curious how these old customs have lasted? like children's games, such as Blind Man's Buff, and children's stories, as Cinderella. These games were played and these stories were told to children hundreds of years ago.

In the month of May the holly bears little white flowers, and at Christmas it wears its bracelets of coral-like berries. These berries last on the trees so long that I have often seen the flowers of May and the berries of Christmas on the tree at the same time.

The same tree very seldom bears a large crop of flowers two seasons together, so one winter we may find a holly loaded with berries and the next winter scarcely any.

The May following the jubilee year, 1887, the flowers of the holly-tree were most remarkable; and consequently, the following Christmas, the quantity of berries was as remarkable. People who never notice such objects had their attention called to them, and made such remarks as "I never knew the holly had flowers." I wonder if these people had ever thought if the tree had no flowers how the berries came.

Birds feed upon the berries without harm, but if children eat too many they will be poisoned, so you must remember to tell this to the very little brothers and sisters who may be

playing with the holly branches. Deer will eat the leaves in winter, and sheep will thrive on them.

Rats and mice sometimes injure the young trees by gnawing the bark, especially when the ground is covered with snow.

The wood is very hard and will take a very high polish. It is often stained blue, green, red or black, when black it is often used in place of ebony for the handles of metal tea-pots.

The holly grows best when it is surrounded by other trees, so as to be shaded without being overtopped. The holly grows very slowly ; in favourable circumstances a hedge of holly will, in about twenty years, attain the height of about sixteen feet.

When Peter the Great visited England, in 1698, he was lodged at Say's Court, the house of John Evelyn—a house at which men of learning were fond of visiting. Peter behaved at this house like a savage, and damaged and destroyed many beautiful things ; amongst them being a beautiful holly hedge, which Evelyn had tended and cultivated for years. and which had been such a source of delight, Evelyn was so grieved and annoyed at this wanton destruction, that he complained to the Government about it. The Government of the day presented him with a sum of money to compensate him for his loss, but that did not restore the beautiful holly hedge.

And about the mistletoe, it is strange too that it has been such a favourite plant through so many years. Two thousand years ago, the old Druids used the mistletoe at their festivals, and though we do not venerate it as they did, we are using it more and more in our Christmas decorations.

If you examine it you will see that it is a curious-looking plant, not at all like any other you know.

The leaves of the holly are bright, dark green, and glossy ; but these leaves of the mistletoe are dull, leathery, and rather a sickly greeny-yellow. Look, too, at the little twigs, they are all separately jointed, and all forked with a curious long, bony look about them. The flowers come in April or May ; they are a greenish-yellow, and very small ! they grow in the forks of the branches.

If the mistletoe is curious in its appearance, it is still more curious in its habits. If one might use such a term, it is hardly a respectable plant. It does not work for itself, it feeds upon another tree. The thrushes are very fond of mistletoe berries, and they no doubt often drop the seeds, which are covered with a sticky substance, and adhere to the trunks and branches of trees, generally the apple, though they may be found upon the pear, hawthorn, common maple, and common ash—rarely upon the oak.

In a few days after finding a resting-place on the tree, the little seed sends out a little rootlet. It is an interesting fact that from whichever part of the seed the rootlet proceeds, it curves towards the centre of the branch upon which it has found a home, whether it has to grow upwards, downwards, or sideways. The rootlet becomes flattened at the end, like the proboscis of an insect, and soon pierces the bark, and roots itself in the growing tree. Here it feeds upon the descending sap, having the power to take just such food as it requires. The wood of the common mistletoe has been found to contain twice as much potash as the tree upon which it has fed.

The mistletoe grows plentifully in the South of England—abundantly in the apple orchards of Hertfordshire. It injures the apple trees upon which it grows, but makes up somewhat for this by the prices obtained for it in all the large towns. More than a hundred tons are sent every Christmas from Herefordshire.

HARRIETT E. FRANKLAND.

CHRISTMAS PUZZLE PAGE.

I.

What's the social tree,
And the dancing tree,
And the trees that are nearest the sea ?
The dandiest tree,
And the kissable tree,
And the tree where the ships may be ?

II.

What's the tell-tale tree,
And the traitor tree,
And the tree that is warmest clad ?
The languishing tree,
The chronologist's tree,
And the tree that makes one sad ?

III.

What's the emulous tree,
The industrious tree,
And the tree that never stands still ?
The unhealthiest tree,
The Egyptian plague tree,
And the tree neither up and down hill ?

IV.

The contemptible tree,
The most yielding tree,
And the tree that bears a curse ?
The reddish brown tree,
And the reddish blue tree,
And the tree like an Irish nurse ?

V.

What's the tree
That made each townsman flee,
And what round itself doth entwine ?
What's the housewife's tree,
And the fisherman's tree,
What by Cockneys is turned into wine ?

VI.

What's the tree that got up,
And the tree that was lazy,
And the tree that guides ships to go forth ?
The tree that's immortal,
And the trees that are not,
And the tree whose wood faces the north ?

VII.

The tree in a bottle.
The tree in a fog,
And what each man becomes ere he's old ?
The tree of the people,
The traveller's tree,
And the tree which the schoolmasters hold ?

VIII.

The tree has passed through the fiery heat ?
That help given to doctors when ill ?
The tree that we offer to friends when we meet ?
And the tree we may use as a grill ?

IX.

What's that tree that in death will benight you ?
And the tree that your wants will supply ?
And the tree that to travel invites you ?
And the tree that forbids us to die ?

X.

My first is that which all possess
And value more than cash,
My next you are if fond of dress,
And love to cut a dash—
My whole is often rich and rare
In colour and perfume,
Please bring it home with loving care,
'Twill decorate my room.

XI.

My first on four feet goes at will,
My second on two feet—unless she is ill—
My third's made in going by one that is still,
My whole—you may be—*I* would rather be *nil.*

XII.

What men oppressed throughout old Egypt sought.
That viewless power, which great wonders wrought.
This place produces balsam, curing pain.
This man to healing knowledge lays false claim.
France, Spain, and Russia, each this fifth must be.
Defiant pledge in days of chivalry.
A stream that Englishmen think of with pride.
Wealth will not give it if to meanness tied.
Extremes are here ; pray find them out.
That you have felt them both I have no doubt

(*Answers in January Number.*)